

# PARTICIPATORY MEDIA IN CAMBODIA

An exploration of relational film, documentary and art



TABLE OF CONTENTS	PAGE
INTRODUCTION	3
THE RESIDENCY	4
KEY PROJECTS:	
Stories From the Building: <a href="http://whitebuilding.org">whitebuilding.org</a>	5
Songs From the Building	14
About the White Building	16
Kep Secret	20
Ladyboy Portraits: Too Old to Change and My Name is Untac	22
Other Outcomes	24
COLLECTIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL PROFILES	29
INDIVIDUAL ARTIST PROFILES	32
DVD APPENDIX	36

## INTRODUCTION

With the financial support of Asialink in 2012 and additional support from the Ian Potter Cultural Trust and the International Documentary Festival Amsterdam (IDFA) fund, and in-kind support from the Bophana Centre in Phnom Penh I was able to return to Cambodia to work with independent Khmer artists and filmmakers who are pushing the boundaries of creative self expression and exploring new forms of articulating their culture for Cambodian and international audiences.

With a long history of violent repression of media and independent, creative self-expression Cambodia has struggled to re-capture the extraordinary cultural capital that blossomed in the 1960s before war, the Khmer Rouge and more than 20 years of political instability destroyed the vibrancy of both traditional and contemporary Cambodian art and culture.

Access to and interest in all aspects of media and screen culture is expanding rapidly, but is hampered by a lack of opportunities that encourage participation and cultural and governmental censorship.

My residency sought to build on more two and a half years work in using media and art for development in the Cambodian context. I had moved to Cambodia in 2009 and returned to Australia in mid 2011. During that time I worked across a variety of participatory media projects for UN agencies, international NGOs and produced digital media projects with the support of media institutions including National Film Board of Canada, EU Media and Screen Australia.

Much of my work focused on working with emerging filmmakers and artists – young people under 30 who are expanding conservative views of Cambodian culture and history and seeking to define their identities beyond the tragedies of the past 40 years. The majority of this work was concerned with exploring new platforms for creative expression with the use of online a focus. In addition a focus was on building or supporting collective, creative endeavours and structures.

Over the course of this work I have developed a series of close relationships with some inspiring individuals and collectives – some of whom will be profiled in this report – and who were key creative collaborators on the variety of projects undertaken. Whilst a large amount of content was produced over the course of the residency, and structures were put in place for continued creativity beyond the scope of the residency, I believe that consolidating these relationships with key collaborators has been the most important outcome of the residency.

## THE RESIDENCY

Over three months, I undertook a series of cross-platform participatory video projects and workshops with the support of Cambodia's centre for screen culture and history, the Bophana Centre, with a focus on foregrounding the voice of Cambodian stories and experience on screen.

The aim of the residency was to:

- Build capacity and engagement of emerging film and art makers through an intensive production and workshop program,
- To create appropriate models of workshop and training programs enabling sustained creative outputs and
- To create an international and national network of partners and mentors to support and strengthen the rejuvenation of Cambodia's unique screen culture – both in Cambodia and in Australia

A key purpose of the residency proposed at the outset was to provide a sustainable platform to give young Cambodian people the opportunity to actively participate in media.

This platform will be found in an innovative online participatory documentary about The White Building: [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org). From January 2013 the project will be live. The outputs of this project to date and production program for the next 6 months will be outlined in this report in detail.

All work produced as a result of the residency forms an important archive and educational tool. The stories are held in a publically accessible archive at the Bophana Centre in Phnom Penh and there have been (and will continue to be) exhibition programs showcasing the works in different settings. Some of these exhibition outputs will be outlined in this report.

This report will describe the activities undertaken, those involved, the outcomes of the programs and the intent that underpinned these activities as a body of work.

The report will also profile organizational and individual partners in Cambodia.



## KEY PROJECTS

### STORIES FROM THE BUILDING

***A multi-platform participatory media project spanning art and media production and training, a website ([whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org)) and exhibition outcomes***

## THE WHITE BUILDING



Collections Themes Media Types

EMBROIDERY THE WHITE BUILDING RESIDENTS MONK ASSISTANTS AT WAT SVAY POR PEI THE SOUND OF THE WHITE BUILDING THE COFFEE SHOP

### THE WHITE BUILDING

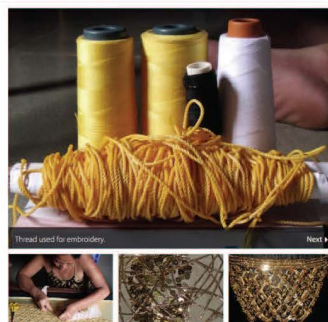
#### EMBROIDERY

By: Chan Molita

My mother is an embroiderer of Cambodia's Royal dance costumes. Her work supports our national art form as we share time, love, and a common thread. This work requires so much patience; not everyone can do it. The people spend so much time to perfect small details. Fingers go numb and rough. Eyes blur. It takes the concentration of not only the hand, but the eye, and the mind.

One piece of consuming - depending on the style - can take my mother between one to two and a half months to complete. And just as the weight of the embroidery can be up to one kilogram, the styles are passed down from the ancient times of the Angkor. However, difficult the work is, it has a lot of benefits, especially that my mother works from our home.

Although she works hard from morning until night, she does not need to work under the hot sun. She is paid because of her unique skills, her manual labor, and this reminds us of her fragile life.



Thread used for embroidery

Next

Collections Themes Media Types



### THE WHITE BUILDING

#### SOUND OF THE WHITE BUILDING

By: Hern Sokung

The sound track playing is a mixture of sounds recorded from many different situations and locations at The White Building. Here they are brought together as the sound of a community. It echoes through the room similar as they all sound echo through our hallways.

I recorded sounds at the market, people solving and consuming materials, children playing, women cooking, dogs barking, wind blowing, the sound of my family speaking about when they came to live here, the sound of my guitar.

To visualize the community through sound is to understand a different texture of life.



Collections Themes Media Types

*Preliminary designs for [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org) (clockwise from top) : Homepage, collection page and photo essay*

The main project that emerged from this residency was a participatory media project based in the White Building. For more detail on the Building see the section in this report *About the Building*.



*Outside the Aziza School at the White Building, Phnom Penh*

The *Stories From The Building* project has been designed as a multi-platform experience spanning online and real world outputs and will be ongoing until at least July 2013.

The project evolved from the feature documentary *Songs From The Building* in production with director Koam Chanrasmey. As we worked within the White Building, we came to realize the complexity of the community. Inside the Building is a unique community with an extraordinary history. There are artists, musicians, teachers and performers, many here at the government's behest for over 30 years. There are schools and businesses and social service organizations. Amongst the decay and grime and the drugs and prostitution there is also a vibrant community.

#### People in the Building



The "Brothers", Sothia outside the Building, Srey Neang smoking in the stairwell, Mae in her kitchen with cats  
Sarath, sophea and friends making dresses on the stairs, the chess players in Ta Barang's cafe, Sarath outside the Building, Sophea and morodup,  
Family in the stairwell, boys playing pool, girls in the hall, Theara and his wife next to their shop

Due to the rapid development of Phnom Penh, the residents of the Building know their time here may be coming to an end. We hope that this project might influence government and developers to at least provide appropriate compensation and see the value of the community inside the shabby exterior of the Building. The project may not stop the impending destruction of the Building but if it can assist the community to have some power in negotiating their continued role in the development of urban Phnom Penh then it's a small success.

Now is the time to find new ways to put forward people's perspectives from the Building before it is finally condemned. Now is the time to speak, to raise awareness, for to keep silent ensures that the people of the Building will again become invisible and thrust to the margins.

Since we began developing the documentary project in 2010 we have been talking with artist/curator and director of Sa Sa Art Projects (who are based at the Building) Vuth Lyno and filmmaker Neang Kavich, a resident of the Building and protégé of Cambodian French filmmaker Rithy Panh, about ways to document the community. It has become clear that an online portrait that captures the breadth of people living here, charts the history of the Building and explores the changing mood of this place over time was a logical solution. The proposed website will be a participatory archive, living memory and a unique curated insight of life in the Building seen through the eyes of its residents.

The project includes participatory processes that support community members to create content and screening and exhibition events in and around their community. In order to extend our engagement with the entire community beyond the scope of a single story (as per *Songs From The Building*) we began to investigate the possibility of an online participatory documentary. This is my main area of practice and would be an area that I could offer support.

Lyno had already undertaken exhibitions at the Building – the White Night and Sounding Room, and had discussed with Smey previously the possibility of some kind of White Building online archive project. Lyno and I had an immediate and strong connection based on shared values and approach to community and participatory art and media making.

We designed a partnership with Sa Sa Art Projects and met with some of the participants in a previous video project that had run at the Building for one month. We proposed to extend the video project with a view towards creating an exhibition at the Building as part of the Cambodia Youth Arts Festival, where Lyno was Visual Arts Manager.

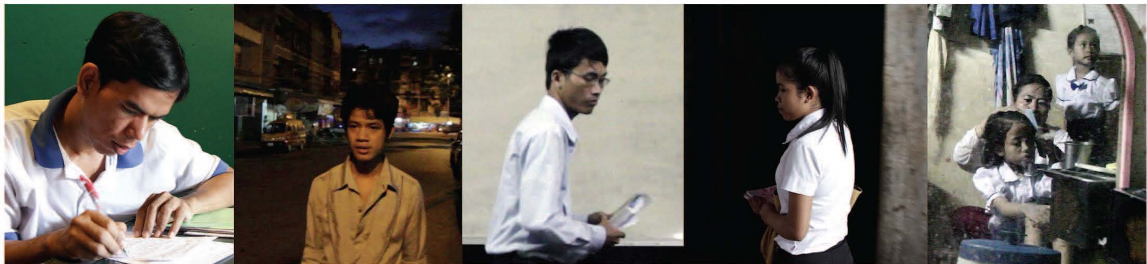
The participants, all of whom were students or teachers at the Aziza school, based in the Building were progressively more and more engaged in the project as we moved through the workshops and a variety of increasingly complex video productions – from a simple series of “One Shot Windows” where the students filmed a scene around their community and then wrote and recorded a short narration describing what we were looking, to “One Shot Portraits” featuring a single unbroken shot following a person in the Building, with accompanying interview voiceover.





*Aziza film students writing scripts for their 'One Show Window'*

The final works produced were team-based projects. One 18 minute documentary *White Life* was produced, following the lives of five residents of the Building and their experience of different stages of education. The commitment of this team to their production was extraordinary, with nearly 2 weeks of 5 a.m. starts and late night filming in order to fit around their day commitments of work and study.



In addition two photo essays were made, and also re-purposed as 5-minute documentaries with accompanying audio of interviews and natural sound.



The first video *Balloon* follows a young boy who is trying to complete his education and contribute to his family through selling balloons at the Royal Palace.





The second video *Edchaiv* follows a woman, her husband and their three adopted children as they struggle to make ends meet as Edchaiv (recyclable collectors).

Over 6 weeks, 26 videos were made, running over 50 minutes in total and 12 workshops were delivered.

The workshops and production programs were run by myself and Koam Chanrasmey with support from filmmaker Neang Kavich. In addition we had workshop support from the other Sa Sa Arts Project workers including Lyno, Lim Sokchanlina and Khvay Samnang, editor Sok Chan Veasna, Bophana multimedia producer and ex-Magnum photographer Damien Sueur, and multimedia producer Marta Soszynska.

### SNIT SNAAL (Intimacy) EXHIBITION

The first public outcome of this project was a community-based exhibition Snit Snaal (Intimacy). The exhibition was designed to reflect the community based production methods, the intimacy of the stories and the wide array of content from video to photos to installation artworks.



ស្និតស្នាល  
ស្នាដៃសិល្បៈនៅក្នុងសហគមន៍

**Snit Snaal**  
Artworks in the community

11 - 18 Nov 2012  
Opening Sun 11 Nov 6:00-8:00pm

Created by:

Chen Sovann  
Chen Sovann  
Chhoun Phou  
Eng Rith Chien Damith  
Korath Chhannaray  
Korath Chhannaray  
Leng Rith  
Masa Chhannaray

Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray  
Masa Chhannaray

Sovan Chhannaray  
Sok Chhannaray  
Tem Sreyapour  
Vannak Sreyapour  
Vannak Sreyapour  
Vannak Sreyapour  
Vannak Sreyapour

អង្គការសិល្បៈ  
The White Building  
entrance corner  
Sobanva Blvd & St 294  
+855 (0)12 53 90 35  
www.sasarts.org



Postcard of Snit Snaal exhibition

We negotiated with all businesses at the base of the Building with TVs in their shops (cafes, restaurants and hairdressers) to take over the TVs for the duration of the exhibition launch. On each of the eight TVs we played one of the eight “One Shot Windows” on a loop. The café outside the Aziza school was transformed into a 50 seat cinema space. On this screen we

played the three team films (*White Life*, *Edchaiy* and *Balloon*) with introductions and discussion from the Aziza filmmakers.



*L-R: TV playing Aziza students film in the chess café; in the hairdressers; restaurant*



*L-R: detail of 11 channel video installation at Aziza; children watch a story; reverse of classroom*



*L-R: Upstairs in Sa Sa Art Project space; Café converted to cinema; Veasna and Aziza students watch the films*



*L-R: wide shot of the café cinema; Smey, Martin and Jocelyn Pederick*

Aziza school spans four rooms in the Building and EYC (Empowering Youth Cambodia) donated the use of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor Aziza classroom space to house a multiscreen installation. Across 11 TVs, setup in the class on the students work benches we screened the “One Shot Portraits”.





One the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the same block Sa Sa Art Projects has its gallery space and we exhibited photo essays, artworks (painting and sculpture) as well as projections and a strange, interactive knitted lampshade with accompanying music soundtrack.

At the end of the block, Sa Sa and the Aziza students involved in the EYC Community Organising workshops had undertaken a community consultation project around public art on the Building.

Residents on each floor had contributed to the design of a mural to be painted on the underside of the stairs on each block. This was facilitated through the NGO STT.



*Painting of one of the flights of stairs at the Building*



## BEYOND THE SNIT SNAAL EXHIBITION

Whilst the Exhibition was a great success with well over 500 residents and outsiders in attendance, and excellent responses from audience members, we saw that the momentum would drop off quickly if a series of staged additional outcomes were not identified.

To this end, we created a 3 month workshop program to be run by Koam Chanrasmey, with support from Neang Kavich and Sok Chan Veasna, designed to raise the professional practice of the Aziza participants.



*Filmmaker Koam Chanrasmey with Aziza student Seng Simaou*

The workshop features a mix of high profile local and international guests, small production exercises and the possibility of a final exhibition and screening of work in February 2013.

The work created to date will also be featured at the Cambodian International Film Festival in December and be held at the Bophana archive for free public access.

At the end of this workshop process we will undertake a 3 month production period with between 8 – 10 of the participants. Individuals will propose and produce one story each per month, over 3 months. This will be paid work as the expectation of the production at this stage will be of professional work. A professional wage is both acknowledgement of the skills acquired over the training process, and an opportunity for the participants to focus on creative work without additional financial pressures.

We have designed an online platform – [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org) – that will showcase the stories and photo essays produced, both in English and Khmer. The Content Management System (CMS) that underpins this project enables remote upload and contextualization of all content. We have trained editor Sok Chan Veasna in operating the CMS, and Veasna will train two of the Aziza participants in operating this system over the next 3 months. We have also ‘turbo-charged’ the Aziza school internet in order to ensure that uploading and accessing content is easy.

We primarily hope to use the online space to engage, create and reinforce community and community identity. The project aims to create a coherent community identity with the hope that this will support stronger intra-community identification and action (currently the community is a series of micro-communities without a strong sense of shared identity, despite shared locale and problems).

Finally we hope that the technical and creative skills that are acquired over time by the Aziza students will benefit their lives and their other work as community organizers and as social workers, lawyers, teachers and NGO workers.

13



## SONGS FROM THE BUILDING

A feature documentary directed by Koam Chanrasmey.

Since the fall of the Khmer Rouge in 1979, Hun Sarath, the last surviving singer of the Royal Palace, has lived in what is known as 'The White Building'.

Now her home is slated for demolition. For many in Phnom Penh the Building is a slum. Erasing this eyesore liberates some of the most valuable land in the city.

In the face of impending destruction of the Building, Sarath gathers old masters and new students to stage a unique performance for her community and to remind the city of the value of Cambodian culture and history.



*Sarath teaching at Apsara Association.*



*Sarath with friends, at the Building*



*with King Sihamoni.*



*Sarath and photo with teacher Em Theay.*



*Sarath*

*Sarath at her home*

## CURRENT PROJECT STATUS

We have completed a detailed outline and scene breakdown for the documentary. This was the main body of our work in the first two weeks of the residency. The narrative that has emerged will likely sustain a 75+ minute documentary.

Over the past 6 months, Smey has continued to spend time with Sarath who is the main character in the film, and a key collaborator. This relationship development is fundamental - trust and respect are never easily given to a documentary maker and in the context of Cambodia this emerges even more slowly. Added to this has been Sarath's recent election as



chief of village of Block 1 in the Building (the Building is officially divided into two villages). This means Sarath is now a member of the Cambodia People's Party (CPP) and with this political engagement and responsibility comes increased barriers to engagement. Smey has made weekly or fortnightly visits to Sarath, at her home and at work, occasionally with camera in tow. Smey has begun to build relationships with Sarath's family, friends and neighbours and on my arrival in Cambodia I was also introduced to family and friends. We participated in a Bonn during Pchum Ben (visit to a pagoda and donation of collected goods and money), attended a ceremony for Katang to support Sarath's fundraising efforts to build a pagoda in Ratanakiri travelled to Ratanakiri for the presentation of the Katang as well as following more day to day activities with family and at her various work.

We have finalized unconditional access to the Apsara Association and the Royal University of Fine Arts where Sarath teaches, and produced a number of small videos for Apsara Association in order to foster ongoing relationships.

We've discussed our proposed vision and treatment of the documentary with Sarath in detail as this treatment was a response to her initial ideas. Sarath is selecting classical songs from her deep knowledge of the classical/ traditional music of Cambodia, to reflect ideas that were raised in these discussions. These songs (and their lyrics) provide increased thematic context for the narrative. Sarath has reinforced her commitment to the writing and performance of a song for the Building, at the Building, and has begun this process with her students at RUFA. We see this performance at the Building as a natural conclusion to the story and a key narrative through line. Presently, Sarath is embracing her role both as central character and creative collaborator in this project and beginning to find her own value in the project.

We are currently seeking financial and network support including: production and completion funding, broadcast and festival interest and interest from distributors focussed on Asian documentary content, or with an interest in land rights or Cambodian arts and culture.

Anticipated completion of this film will be October 2013.



## ABOUT THE WHITE BUILDING



*Exterior of the White Building, 2012*

In 1961, former King and first Prime Minister of a newly independent Cambodia Norodom Sihanouk addressed the Governor of Phnom Penh regarding the need for an urban housing solution:

*...our capital must deal with the problem of the urban population, i.e. the modernization of housing...I do not think it is necessary to remind you of the social and hygiene problems, the fire risk, the infrastructure and transport problems...We must begin the construction of low-cost apartment buildings that can be rented or sold to average and small income families. This will no doubt take some time and requires progressive planning and investment.*

Lu Ban Hap, Director of the Municipal Town Planning and Housing Department and Vann Molyvann, Head of the Urban Planning and Housing Department of the Ministry of Public Works worked with Russian engineer Vladimir Bodiansky to design the ambitious master plan for the Bassac riverfront development including multi-level, low cost housing and public buildings such as the Chaktomouk Exhibition Hall and Bassac National Theatre spread over 24 hectares. A centerpiece of the development were the Municipal Apartments and the Olympic Village Housing (constructed for the 1966 Ganefo Games, a short lived Asian alternative to the Olympic Games). The Municipal Apartments were a unique social housing development in that it was one of the first multi storey social housing developments created by an independent Asian government and designed to provide low cost housing.





*Aerial view of the Bassac Riverfront development, c. early 1965. Top left is the White Building. Top right is the triangular Bassac National Theatre (burnt in 1994 and demolished in December 2007). The Grey Building has now been completely transformed and is now unrecognizable as the Phnom Penh Centre. The two long apartment buildings in the bottom left and centre of the image are now used by the Russian Embassy as accommodation for embassy staff and military.*

Inspired by Le Corbusier's "Ville Radieuse" the architects surrounded the complex of apartment buildings with generous open space. Both buildings shared key design elements. They were oriented parallel to the river, and with their enormous size, could have become solid walls cutting off the city from the riverfront. Thus, open terraces were used to break down their volume, each located adjacent to the kitchen.



*The Grey and White Buildings, 1966*



The Municipal Apartments (the White Building's original name) were inaugurated in 1963 and consisted of 468 apartments for municipal staff, teachers and other public servants. Designed not only to provide basic shelter, the development adapted a modern architectural vocabulary to Cambodia's culture and climate.



*The White Building soon after completion, 1965*



*Rare colour photo of White Building (top right), Grey Building and the iconic pyramid roof of the Basseac National Theatre, c. 1966.*

After the fall of Khmer Rouge in 1979, and as people moved back to the abandoned Phnom Penh, the few surviving artists (mostly performing artists) were called to gather and live in The White Building due to its proximity to the National Theatre. Over three decades, the residing community has grown and diversified, but is still a mostly low-income urban population. Due to poor maintenance and ongoing restructuring of the exterior, the Building is in poor condition. Today, the fading facade and dilapidated infrastructure houses a complex community of over

two thousand residents including artists, musicians, community activists and everyday city dwellers as well as drug dealers, addicts and prostitutes.



*L-R: 1991, children play outside the White Building (Serge Corrieras), 1993, village children in militia training (Roland Neveu), residents on the stairs of the White Building, 1991 (Serge Corrieras)*



*The Building today. Photo by Chhunn Phanith, an Aziza student and participant in the Stories From The Building project*



## 4K KEP PROJECT

Production of short film with the 4K collective in the seaside town of Kep.



One of the original aims of the residency had been to re-imagine the archive of Bophana. This re-imagining proved difficult as Bophana has a publically accessible archive, but like any library, are still subject to copyright law. Re-mixing and re-imagining an archive when the archive is not copyright holder becomes slightly more complex.

With the Kep Secret project we incorporated audio archive from films, radio and CDs either owned by Bophana, or altered beyond recognition into the sound design of the film.

Kep Secret is a story from cineaste and director Prum Seila. Seila has an encyclopedic knowledge of South East Asian and this would be his first

fiction film with a view that the style of the transplanted audio into contemporary environments could be re-visited in a feature film to be produced late 2013 in Phnom Penh. I had worked with Seila over some years in the context of the 4K collective and this would be the first substantial activity for the group since the Film Camp in March 2012.

Kep Secret is three stories in a single story: a triptych that moves across time and space, and from non-fiction to fiction. The film starts with a contemporary re-imagination of the evocative, decaying buildings of Kep - a brainstorming session tracing the origins of the fiction component of the film. Then, influenced by traditional Cambodian shadow puppetry the film reveals a glimpse behind the screen - acknowledging the construct of our fiction. The final section is a bold fictional, improvised experiment with non-professional actors (children from Kep), incorporating sounds of old archival material re-mixed into a new soundscape – a re-invigoration of old archive into new memories. Although the end result is somewhat confused, this represented a new approach for all involved to creating films (no script, amateur actors) and presenting narrative as visual and less expository (rather than dialogue or voiceover heavy pieces that drive the images).



Seila observes that the evocative, abandoned buildings in Kep inspired the film. Kep had been a popular holiday place for the French colonials from the 1920s until 1940s and then the Phnom Penh elite during the period of Sihanouk's reign. Post 1979 the houses were stripped for tiles, wire and plumbing materials and sold for scrap by families suffering through the 1979 and 1980 famines that ravaged the country following the Khmer Rouge regime.



*Some of the Kep Secret Cast and Crew on location*

In 2013 a Kep Expo will be held, spanning architectural, art and film related projects with the intention of preserving and restoring some of the beautiful buildings that have fallen into ruin – and are, in some ways, a 20<sup>th</sup> century echo of the Angkorean ruins.

Kep Secret will be screened in Kep, in the house in which it was shot, during Kep Expo ([kepexpo.com](http://kepexpo.com)) and will also be featured at the Cambodian International Film Festival in December.

## HEM VANNA: LADYBOY DOCUMENTARIES

Two documentaries were completed with filmmaker Hem Vanna. 3 years ago Vanna and I produced a film together about a gay couple. The film was well received in the LGBT community and support organizations that work with the community in Phnom Penh. Since this time Vanna has become an unofficial documenter of the community's stories.

Over the course of this residency we produced two documentaries on 'ladyboys'. Vanna hoped to show the disparate experience of urban and provincial ladyboys in Cambodia. The community, in general, is far smaller, and far more heavily discriminated against than the ladyboy community in Thailand – and as a result is far more closed to outsiders. With strong, long-term relationships with both people in the films Vanna was able to get unique access to the stories.

The first documentary produced was on Kampong Chhnang based Kahei. Kahei is 52 years old and lives alone in a small house in the countryside. She raises ducks and chickens and has a small catering business. She recalls her time growing up gay under the Khmer Rouge and the issues she faces as a ladyboy living in a small country town.

The second documentary produced focused on Shamel, 22 years old and living in Phnom Penh. Shamel is a performer at Classic Night Club and is half Ghanian and half Cambodian – hence her stage name "Srey Mao" (Black Lady).



Her father was a UNTAC soldier in Cambodia between 1992 – 1994. Shamel experiences discrimination as a ladyboy and as a dark skinned person. As she says, "my skin colour is different from others and Cambodians don't like it all." Despite having to move away from her family and confront significant racism Shamel has found many opportunities in the city and come to terms with her own sin; "I never expected that I could have this kind of life... I love the way I look now, I love my skin colour."

Shamel's story has been very compelling and there is potentially a longer form documentary in this story.

In addition, Vanna has begun research on a documentary that explores the evolution of a ladyboy language – a kind of 'pig latin' Khmer in which 'Sor', 'Kor' and other syllables are inserted into words and new slang words are invented, creating a codified language accessible mostly only by the ladyboy community. This language is shared across the country.

It has its roots in the civil war of the 1970s as the royalist soldiers used the 'Sor' language as a code around the Khmer Rouge. During the Khmer Rouge period the language spread beyond the former Royalist soldiers and was widely used to avoid the many ears of the spying Khmer Rouge (who would often pay children to sleep under huts to ensure that no talk of revolution was happening and that forced marriages were being consummated). Quite how this language evolved from the language of secret revolution into a ladyboy specific language is something we have yet to find out. Both Kahei and Shamel use this language extensively in their day to day conversation – which is what brought it Vanna's attention.



## OTHER WORK

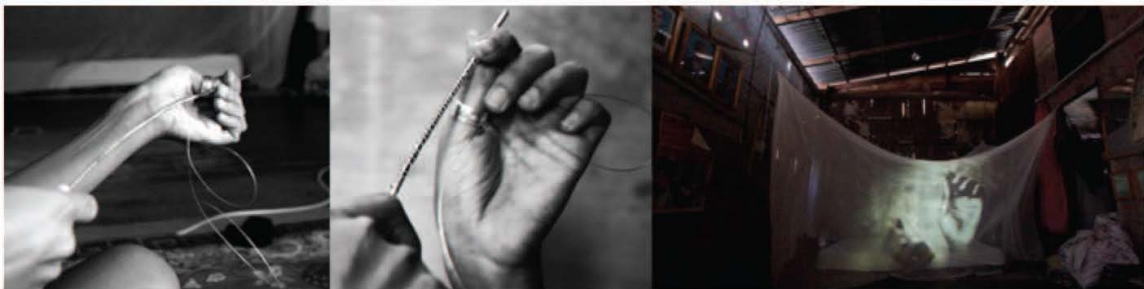


*Still from Lim Sokchanlina's Iced Confection, 2 screen video installation at Cambodian Living Arts as part of the Cambodia Youth Arts Festival*

## TITH KANITHA

Artist Tith Kanitha was also involved in the 4K collective, and it was through this collective and her work on various films including Davy Chou's that I first met her. The artist profile later in this report will detail Kanitha's work.

We collaborated on a series of video and projection artworks and documentation of performance work. The video of Kanitha's *Heavy Sand* is included in the DVD appendix.



*Stills from Tith Kanitha's video work; projection on mosquito net at Boeung Kak studio*

## BBC WORLD SERVICE: LOY 9

1 day consultancy and 1 day project design with the scriptwriting team of the BBC world service's most successful Cambodian TV program Loy 9.

I was asked by lead writer Ian Masters and producer Deep Gauchan to present to the team of 6 about the *Big Stories Small Towns* project in Ratanakiri, working with the Indigenous people in Banlung and participatory processes in film and media.

BBC will undertake an ambitious participatory filmmaking process in Ratanakiri for the second season of Loy 9, and as this is outside of their field of expertise, were seeking some foundational participatory structures and insights. The team is now in Ratanakiri on the first of a two-stage process designed by myself and Ian.

## **YOUTH TODAY**

2 day camera workshop with local NGO Support Children and Young People who produce the TV show *Youth Today*. Worked with 12 staff and young reporters from the organization to train them on use of their Canon 7D for future productions.

## **KHMER FILM FOUNDATION**

Script, production and organizational support to founders Sum Sithen and Chhay Bora. I gave extensive script and treatment feedback and development for the first documentary to be produced by the KFF on the little known Koh Ker temple complex. I also consulted with the foundation on developing their constitution and their corporate structure.

## **KON KHMER, KOUN KHMER**

In addition to the Kep Secret project I undertook 2 days of script and pre-production consultancy with 10 Kon Khmer members on development of their next short film “Ring” – a short drama that follows a young students’ journey from the province to the city and traces her loss of innocence and re-discovery of resilience. A ring given to her by her mother is a central object in the narrative thread. The film will be produced by the 4K collective in early 2013.

## **ARTS + SOCIETY**

An ongoing, fortnightly programme designed to foster a critically engaged art culture. I attended an artist talk by Pich Sopheap at his studio and presented on “Film As Art” offering a brief history of alternative uses of film outside of a cinema context.

Although this presentation was poorly attended (20 people), five of the attendees created a Khmer only ‘celluloid salon’ called *Lumiere* following our additional discussions post-presentation. The group has come together based on the assumption that Khmer people need to find a space to develop their own critical faculties, away from international moderation and input. Through *Lumiere* they can build a critical confidence that is often lacking in settings where foreigners are offering opinions or feedback. The first *Lumiere* discussion group was organized by photographer Vandy Rattana and screened Kurosawa’s film *Rashomon*. With Koam Chanrasmeay and Rattana, a program of films has been sourced and this group meets fortnightly to continue their discussions.

## **SA SA BASSAC GALLERY**

I produced video documentation for the Sa Sa Bassac event *Reclamation Recreation: An Urban Beach Party*, the closing event of Khvay Samnang’s *Newspaper Man* exhibition in which the sand filled Sa Sa Bassac gallery became a place for a range of artists (Nget Rady, Belle, Nuon Sovitou, Than Sok, Tith Kanitha, Khvay Samnang and Lim Sokchanlina) to create work inspired the complex recent history and current state of public reclamation at the now sand filled Boeung Kak Lake.



*Still from Khvoy Samnang's video Newspaper Man (at Boeung Kok Lake)*

I also gave ongoing technical support to the Sa Sa collective and supported the production a two screen video installation *Ice of Confection* by photographer Lim Sokchanlina.

## **META HOUSE**

Two screenings and discussion of the Big Stories, Small Towns (Banlung) participatory online documentary project with Koam Chanrasmeay at local media arts space Meta House.

## **A QUICK NOTE**

I had hoped to work with blogger and journalist Keo Kounila (<http://www.blueladyblog.com/>) who was extensively involved in the 4K collective. We identified some form of online documentary as a site for collaboration but were unable to undertake this work during this residency with available time and resources.

However, Kounila is pushing the boundaries of creative self-expression in the Cambodian context and I wanted to include some reference to her.

Kounila will be involved in future developments of the whitebuilding.org project.



## DEATH OF KING FATHER NORODOM SIHANOUK



*A line of monks wait outside the Royal Palace for the return of King Father Sihanouk's body from Beijing*

The death of Sihanouk had enormous impact on the residency – not least due to the fact that the nation stopped for a week of mourning.

It was an extraordinary opportunity to be in the country at this time and to live through a moment of history. The end of the pure Khmer royal line, the death of the father of Independence, Sihanouk was adored by many in Cambodia. Two days after his death I was amazed to see (literally) thousands of people looking upwards to the night sky utterly convinced they were seeing the King Father's face in the moon - a mass hallucination.

However Sihanouk was not missed by some – the man who had opened the gates for civil war through his over-indulgences of the 1960s, the man who sided with the Khmer Rouge in the foolish belief he could control them, who convinced his son Ranaridh to share prime ministerial power with Hun Sen in 1993 after Ranaridh had convincingly won the UN supported election and who had disappeared to Paris, Beijing and Pyongyang in times of crisis.

He was a divisive figure and his death has opened up discussion of the situation of Cambodia in the present triggered by a deeper exploration of its recent past as all media trawls back through the stages of Sihanouk's life – presenting films, documentaries and archival material rarely seen by the general population.

His death has been a catalyst for a national self-analysis of the past 50 years. Who knows what will emerge from this.



*As King's body arrives at the Royal Palace, over 1 million people lined the streets to pay their respects. Above and below: press and mourners at the gate of the Palace, a man walks past memorial to Sihanouk faced masked by a portrait of the King, a nun mourns in front of the Palace, a Dharma walk to the Palace.*



## COLLECTIVE AND ORGANISATIONAL PROFILES

### Bophana Centre

The Bophana Audiovisual Resource Centre was established in December 2006 in order to collect and preserve the film, photographic and audio history of Cambodia. The core mission of the Centre is as a publically accessible archive that gathers together audiovisual material on Cambodia, from around the world, and allows people open access to this audiovisual memory in order to transmit Cambodian history and culture to future generations. The archive plays a key role in the expression of Cambodian identity and in the constitution of its heritage.

Beyond its role as archive the Centre also fosters the development of an active local screen culture. In 2009 the Centre hot-housed the Cambodian Film Commission, which has now become a standalone organisation and presents the Cambodian International Film Commission, ongoing technical workshops and facilitates foreign filmmakers seeking to film in Cambodia. The Bophana Centre produces a variety of media and has supported the production of a number of award winning documentaries including the IDFA featured *Red Wedding (Noces Rouges)* by Lida Chan and Guillaume Petit Suon. The Centre trains Cambodian people in media making and literacy through workshops and an exhibition program.

Bophana provided office and administrative support for the duration of the residency as well as providing access to production and exhibition equipment and facilities. I delivered a number of workshops, masterclasses and training programs whilst at Bophana supporting staff, members and other arts practitioners in a wide range of skills and creative development.

### Aziza School and EYC (Empowering Youth in Cambodia)

Aziza School, located in the White Building, has been providing free English lessons, leadership training, computers, life skills, job placement and medical services to the local community since May 2006. The school provides classes and activities from morning until evening every day of the week. On weekdays English and computers are taught at various levels to students aged 6-20 years old. Khmer (Cambodian) nationals teach all the classes, and utilize Khmer and foreign volunteers. Weekly activities include a youth group, community organizing program, legal rights training, art workshops, movie screenings, yoga, dance-aerobics, traditional dance, cycling and soccer, as well as guest lecturers, photography, and field trips.

*Empowering Youth in Cambodia* oversees 4 schools, including the Aziza school, based in poor communities that also act as community centers. They provide services and programs for over 800 local youth and their families. EYC continue to offer ongoing staff, technical and in-kind support to the whitebuilding.org project.



Aziza students and staff received training and production support over a 6 week period to produce a series of video, photo and art works that were featured in the Snit Snaal exhibition. In addition the Aziza participants are currently undertaking a 3 month workshop and training program, followed by a 3 month professional production program to create the participatory online documentary project [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org)

### **Sa Sa Art Projects**

Sa Sa Art Projects is a not-for-profit artist-operated space founded in 2010 by the Cambodian arts collective Stiev Selapak. Located in the historic apartment block known as the **White Building** on Sothearos Boulevard, Sa Sa Art Projects aims to foster a community of knowledge sharing and to create opportunities for emerging Cambodian artists to realise new ideas. It does these by serving as a venue to accommodate experimental art practices, residencies, talks, classes, and community participation. Sa Sa Art Projects also strives to engage with the residents at the **White Building** through special community projects, facilitating the local community to find new mechanisms to express themselves through creative means. Vuth Lyno, who is working on the [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org) project, is director of Sa Sa Art Projects.

*Stiev Selapak*, or Art Rebels, is an arts collective formed in 2007 by six artists and photographers: Heng Ravuth, Khvay Samnang, Kong Vollak, Lim Sokchanlina, Vandy Rattana, and Vuth Lyno. The collective's purpose was to "help each other achieve art projects by sharing knowledge and resources". They collaborated on various projects based on their strengths and availability.

In 2009, the group opened the Sa Sa art gallery space in a small wing of a restaurant. In 2011 Sa Sa Art Gallery merged with Bassac Art Projects to create SA SA BASSAC, a gallery and resource center dedicated to creating, facilitating, producing, and sharing contemporary visual culture in and from Cambodia.

I partnered with Sa Sa Art Projects to organize the Snit Snaal exhibition and to facilitate the ongoing production of the [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org) project as well as ongoing technical and creative support to individual artists within the group.

### **Kon Khmer, Koun Khmer**

The film collective Kon Khmer Koun Khmer (Khmer Films, Khmer Youth, also known as 4K) was established in early 2009. They are self-sustained team of young people from diverse productions who produce films, film festivals, and organize a variety of film related events and offer a vital network and support group enabling other young Cambodians to engage with film and screen culture.

4K emerged from a project run by French Cambodian filmmaker Davy Chou (*Golden Slumbers*). The group has more than 60 members, with a core group of around 20 people. I have been a mentor to the team since they were established.

The team produced a collaborative film, *Twin Diamonds*, in 2009, an exhibition exploring the history of Cambodian cinema, *Golden Re-awakening*, event management of the 2010 Cambodian Youth Arts Festival, *Film Camp 2012*, attended by over 500 people, a series of short films including *Boyfriend* and the Chaktomouk Short Film Festival in 2012.

General representative of the group Sum Sithen has now formed the Khmer Film Foundation with filmmaker Chhay Bora (director of feature film: *Lost Loves*) to seek out additional funding opportunities to support sustained local production.

I provide continued mentor support to Sithen in overseeing the 4K group as well as the newly established KFF. I undertook a series of script workshops developing a new short film (*Ring*) and produced and facilitated the short films *Kep Secret* and *Dara* by 4K members Prum Seila and Phichith Rithea.



## INDIVIDUAL ARTIST PROFILES

### Koam Chanrasmey



Koam Chanrasmey (Smey) and myself have been working together since 2009 on a variety of projects – he has been the main collaborator in this residency.

Smey was born in Kandal Province, Cambodia in 1989 and has been involved in media since an early age.

From 2004 – 2007 he was a young reporter on the weekly *Youth Today* TV show. In 2006 Smey was scriptwriter on the Imaging Our Mekong documentary *Life Without Choice*. In 2007 he was awarded an Imaging Our Mekong Fellowship to study in the Philippines and produced, directed and wrote the film *Floating Village* examining the situation of Vietnamese migrant children living in a floating village on the Tonle Sap.

In 2009 Smey wrote a 20 part TV series exploring issues around maternal health for Cambodian Health Education Media (CHEMS) and produced a number of acclaimed documentaries for local NGO MOPOSJO and was a facilitator on the *Youth Today* show, where I began to work with him.

Since 2010 Smey has continued to write, produce and direct documentaries for Cambodian television and international NGOs working with UNICEF, Bayon TV and CTN. He was a facilitator and fixer on the film “Landless” for SBS Australia.

We worked on the Phnom Penh component of *HighRise (Out My Window)* for the National Film Board of Canada (<http://interactive.nfb.ca/#/outmywindow>). *HighRise (Out My Window)* won a digital Emmy in 2011 and the inaugural IDFA award for digital storytelling. Smey was Cambodian director on the pilot for Honkytonk Films *Boomtown Babylon* directed by Vincent Moon and produced by me and Lotje Soddeland. He was co-director and filmmaker in residence for the SXSWi award winning online documentary *Big Stories, Small Towns* project in Banlung, Ratanakiri ([www.bigstories.com.au](http://www.bigstories.com.au)) of which I’m creative director and producer. In 2011 we facilitated a participatory media project *Floating Cinema*, in a number of floating villages on the Tonle Sap Lake for local NGO Osmose, Spanish NGO ASAD and Granada University (Spain).

In 2012 we received development funding from the IDFA Fund (Netherlands) and Britdoc (UK) to develop and produce a feature documentary *Stories From the Building*, currently in production. From this project the *Stories From The Building* project emerged, of which Smey is creative director.

## Vuth Lyno



Vuth Lyno (born 1982, Phnom Penh) is an artist and curator and a founding member of the artist collective Stiev Selapak (Art Rebels) and director of Sa Sa Art Projects which is Cambodia's only artist-run space dedicated to experimental and participatory arts and located in the White Building. We collaborated on the Snit Snaal exhibition and continue to work together on the Stories From The Building project ([whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org)).

Working primarily with photography and sound, Lyno is interested in ideas around social transformation and national progress in Cambodia. His works tend to be participatory in nature, and to engage specific Cambodian communities and the cultures unique to them. He obtained a Bachelor's degree in Information Technology in 2007 as well as a Master's degree in Social Science in 2009 at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Australia. In 2013 he will undertake further studies in the USA in Art History through a Fulbright Scholarship.

He has organized numerous exhibitions and events in Cambodia, most recently as Visual Arts Manager of the Cambodian Youth Arts Festival and staged the first exhibitions at the White Building *The White Night* and *The Sounding Room*.

Through the partnership with Sa Sa art projects Lyno co-designed the Stories From The Building production and exhibition process and will be a co-producer of the [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org) website.

## Neang Kavich



Neang Kavich (born 1987, Phnom Penh) is a final year student at Limkokwing University majoring in Graphic Design. Kavich lives in the White Building in Phnom Penh and has a long association with Aziza School. Kavich was first exposed to traditional Khmer arts through the Cambodian Living Arts organization that had a studio in the Building, and studied folk and classical Khmer dance for seven years. From 2007 until 2009, Kavich was an assistant to the CLA studio engineers. In 2008, Kavich performed in England and Scotland with his dance class for the WOMAD and Edinburgh Arts Festivals.

In 2008, he made a short documentary *Dancing in the Building* about a resident of the White Building and their passion for classical Khmer dance. In 2009, Kavich attended a documentary workshop and directed the short film *Smot* about Khmer funeral music and he was a founding member of the 4K film collective. In 2010, Kavich was selected for Rithy Panh's film workshop in which he produced another short film *Scale Boy*. Currently Kavich is directing his first feature

length documentary *Where I Go?* The film is produced by Rithy Panh and follows a half Cameroon/ half Cambodian boy on a quest to find his father – a former UNTAC soldier.

Kavich was a lead facilitator working with the Aziza students on the *Stories From The Building* project and continues to be involved in the project as a film facilitator and filmmaker on this project.

### Hem Vanna



Hem Vanna (born, 1984 Kampong Chhnang) came to Phnom Penh in 2003 to find work to support his parents and extended family. Despite not having graduated school, with his excellent English language skills Vanna was able to find work teaching, and in 2005 found work as a production assistant at a local NGO SCY, who produced the *Youth Today* TV Show. Over 2 years Vanna developed his skills as producer and director of documentary as well as training more than 100 people in media production. In 2010 Vanna became film co-ordinator at Meta House, the

German Cambodian Cultural Centre where he oversaw the production and media training program and was director and producer on a variety of documentaries, as well as completing university. In 2012 Vanna moved back to SCY as production co-ordinator of the *Youth Today* program and has produced a number of independent documentaries on the LGBT scene in Phnom Penh since 2010.

I met Vanna in 2009 at SCY, supported him to find work at Meta House and produced and provided technical support for the Ladyboy documentary portraits as well as creating a proposal for a longer version of the *Srey Mao* story.

### Prum Seila



Prum Seila (born 1987, Phnom Penh) graduated from the Royal University of Phnom Penh's Department of Media and Communication in 2010. His graduate film *Blessed Forest* received the highest grade that year and has since been screened at numerous festivals. He made a series of documentaries funded by the US Embassy in Phnom Penh and became a director of the reality TV program *Youth Leadership Challenge*. In late 2012 he received a scholarship to undertake a Masters in

Communication for Development at the University of Philippines and is now based in Los Banos. Since 2009 he has been involved in the 4K film collective. In 2009 he was a production manager and scriptwriter on the film *Twin Diamonds*. He was production manager of the



*Golden Re-Awakening* exhibition celebrating the history of Cambodian cinema and was a lead organizer of the first ever Film Camp in 2012, attended by over 500 people.

Seila was director of the *Kep Secret* short film project.

### **Tith Kanitha**



Tith Kanitha (born 1987, Phnom Penh) graduated from the Royal University of Fine Arts in 2008. Kanitha's practice combines sculpture and installation, usually driven by the relationship between her memory and her environment. Her works tend to be intuitive and meditative, exploring new possibilities in the process of creation. Her first solo exhibition *Companions* (Institut Français, Cambodge, 2011) marked a decisive shift, with the

artist focusing on new material – hand-spun light industrial wire. Kanitha has exhibited widely in Cambodia and internationally, and was a recipient of the You Khin Memorial Women's Art Prize in 2010. Her group exhibitions include *SurvivArt* (Meinblau, Berlin, 2012), *Hey Sister, Where Are You Going* (Sovana Shopping Mall, 2010), *Neak Ta Project*, immersive video art (Institut Français, Cambodge, 2010), *Waiting*, with Qudy Xu (Hôtel de la Paix, 2009) and *Art of Survival* (Meta House and Bophana, 2008).

Kanitha works across a variety of mediums and has worked as tour manager for US/ Cambodian band Dengue Fever, production assist on the film *Don't Think I've Forgotten* (dir: John Pirozzi), is a founding member of the 4K film collective, a member of the first Cambodian women's art collective Selapak Neari, founded with Linda Saphan and art director of the *Golden Re-Awakening* exhibition.

Kanitha created a series of video artworks and video documentation of specific works over the course of this residency, combining, for the first time, her interests in art and film.

## APPENDIX: OVERVIEW OF WORK INCLUDED ON DVD

Key works produced during this residency are included as a DVD appendix to the project.

They are as follows:

**Stories From The Building** – a series of participatory documentaries made with residents of the White Building. These films and photo essays are the first step in the evolving story mapping project that is [whitebuilding.org](http://whitebuilding.org). The first stage culminated in the exhibition *Snit Snaal* (Intimacy) held at the Building.

The films include a series of single shot documentaries exploring lives of people in the Building, one shot 'windows' created by the students focusing on what they see around their community and three 'team' films including a documentary exploring different experiences of education, and two photo essay based portraits of a young boy and a woman collecting recycling to support her adopted children.

**Kep Secret** – produced with Kon Khmer, *Koun Khmer Kep Secret* is a short experimental fiction film that re-imagined the audio archive from Bophana in the evocative setting of the seaside town of Kep. *Kep Secret* was directed by Prum Seila and an additional, as yet unfinished film was produced by Rithea Phichith

**Ladyboy Documentaries: Too Old to Change and My Name is UNTAC** – two portrait documentaries made with Hem Vanna focusing on the experience of a ladyboy living in the provinces and a ladyboy in the city.

**Heavy Sand** – a performance art piece by Tith Kanitha in the Sa Sa art space that explores the destruction of Boeung Kak lake and the eviction of lakeside, from the artists personal experience as a resident of the community. This represents one of a number of the experimental works undertaken by Kanitha over the course of the residency.



*Video Still from Tith Kanitha's 'Heavy Sand' at Sa Sa Bassac Gallery, October 2012*

Additional material includes an interview with myself , Lyno and Smey for the **White Building** exhibition by the Phnom Penh Post.

*Additional work still in production or post production:*

**Songs From The Building:** a feature length documentary with Koam Chanrasmey and a core part of the development process of the residency. The documentary has now received additional support from Britdoc (UK) and we are continuing production and development of this 80 minute documentary for international festival markets. We anticipate end 2013 completion.



*Hun Sarath, in Ratanakiri province, leads a group doing 'Katang' – a presentation of donations raised to build a pagoda*